



AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS (CLEAN COPY)

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. (Currently Amended) An assembly for mooring a vessel (2) at sea to a body (1) comprising

a yoke (10, 10') selectively disconnectably coupled between said vessel (2) and said body (1) and having first and second ends with a non-disconnectable coupling arrangement between said first end and said body and a disconnectable coupling arrangement between said second end and said vessel,

said non-disconnectable coupling arrangement including a pivoted connection between said first end of said yoke (10, 10') and said body (1) that allows said yoke to rotate about a horizontal axis,

said disconnectable coupling arrangement including a first coupling member (32, 32') at said second end of said yoke which is arranged and designed for mating with a second coupling member (34, 34') carried by said vessel (2),

a tension member (20, 110) arranged and designed to extend through said first and second coupling members and to be coupled between a winch mechanism (18, 18', 106) and a connector (42, 42'), said mechanism and connector being arranged and designed to pull said first coupling mechanism (32, 32') into engagement with said second coupling mechanism (34, 34'),

a selectively operated locking mechanism (80) arranged and designed between said first and second coupling members (32, 34) to lock said yoke (10) to said vessel (2), thereby mooring said vessel (2) to said body (1) or to unlock said yoke (10) from said vessel (2) thereby allowing said tension member (20, 110) to be uncoupled from said connector (42) for disconnecting said yoke (10) from said vessel (1), wherein

said body (1) is an LNG process vessel, and said vessel (2) is an LNG carrier vessel,

said first coupling member includes a male guide cone (32) mounted on a multiple axis joint (30) which is attached to said second end of said yoke (10),

 said second coupling member includes a female receiver (34) mounted on an extension (8) of said vessel (2) and arranged and designed to receive said guide cone (32),

 said connector (42) is mounted on said extension (8),

 said winch mechanism (21) is mounted on said yoke (10), and

 said tension member (20) extends from said connector (42) through said multiple axis joint and via guide wheels (26a, 26b) to said winch mechanism (21).

2. (Cancelled)

3. (Currently Amended) The assembly of claim 1 comprising,

 a buoyant element (28) located at said second end of said yoke (10) to cause said second end of said yoke (10) not to sink when said first and second coupling members are selectively disconnected and said second end of said yoke (10) rotates about said horizontal axis into the sea.

4. (Cancelled)

5. (Cancelled)

6. (Currently Amended) An assembly for mooring a vessel (2) at sea to a body (1) comprising

 a yoke (10, 10') selectively disconnectably coupled between said vessel (2) and said body (1) and having first and second ends with a non-disconnectable coupling arrangement between said first end and said body and a disconnectable coupling arrangement between said second end and said vessel,

 said non-disconnectable coupling arrangement including a pivoted connection between said first end of said yoke (10, 10') and said body (1) that allows said yoke to rotate about a horizontal axis,

said disconnectable coupling arrangement including a first coupling member (32, 32') at said second end of said yoke which is arranged and designed for mating with a second coupling member (34, 34') carried by said vessel (2),

 a tension member (20, 110) arranged and designed to extend through said first and second coupling members and to be coupled between a winch mechanism (18, 18', 106) and a connector (42, 42'), said mechanism and connector being arranged and designed to pull said first coupling mechanism (32, 32') into engagement with said second coupling mechanism (34, 34'),

 a selectively operated locking mechanism (80) arranged and designed between said first and second coupling members (32, 34) to lock said yoke (10) to said vessel (2), thereby mooring said vessel (2) to said body (1) or to unlock said yoke (10) from said vessel (2) thereby allowing said tension member (20, 110) to be uncoupled from said connector (42) for disconnecting said yoke (10) from said vessel (1), wherein

 said body (1) is an LNG process vessel, and said vessel (2) is an LNG carrier vessel,
 said first coupling member includes a male guide cone (32) mounted on a multiple axis joint (30) which is attached to said second end of said yoke (10), and

 said second coupling member includes a female receiver (34) mounted on an extension (8) of said vessel (2) and arranged and designed to receive said guide cone (32), and

 said multiple-axis joint is a spherical ball joint.

7. (Currently Amended) An assembly for mooring a vessel (2) at sea to a body (1) comprising

 a yoke (10, 10') selectively disconnectably coupled between said vessel (2) and said body (1) and having first and second ends with a non-disconnectable coupling arrangement

between said first end and said body and a disconnectable coupling arrangement between said second end and said vessel,

 said non-disconnectable coupling arrangement including a pivoted connection between said first end of said yoke (10, 10') and said body (1) that allows said yoke to rotate about a horizontal axis,

 said disconnectable coupling arrangement including a first coupling member (32, 32') at said second end of said yoke which is arranged and designed for mating with a second coupling member (34, 34') carried by said vessel (2),

 a tension member (20, 110) arranged and designed to extend through said first and second coupling members and to be coupled between a winch mechanism (18, 18', 106) and a connector (42, 42"), said mechanism and connector being arranged and designed to pull said first coupling mechanism (32, 32') into engagement with said second coupling mechanism (34, 34'),

 a selectively operated locking mechanism (80) arranged and designed between said first and second coupling members (32, 34) to lock said yoke (10) to said vessel (2), thereby mooring said vessel (2) to said body (1) or to unlock said yoke (10) from said vessel (2) thereby allowing said tension member (20, 110) to be uncoupled from said connector (42) for disconnecting said yoke (10) from said vessel (1), wherein

 said body (1) is an LNG process vessel, and said vessel (2) is an LNG carrier vessel,

 said tension member is a chain (20) having a chain end fitting (19),

 said connector is a chain stopper (42) mounted on a shock absorber (44) carried by an extension (8) of said vessel (2), said chain stopper arranged and designed for selectively clamping said chain end fitting (19), whereby,

 said shock absorber (44) minimizes shock loads to said chain (20) while said first coupling member (30, 32) is pulled toward said second coupling member (34).

8. (Currently Amended) An assembly for mooring a vessel (2) at sea to a body (1) comprising

a yoke (10, 10') selectively disconnectably coupled between said vessel (2) and said body (1) and having first and second ends with a non-disconnectable coupling arrangement between said first end and said body and a disconnectable coupling arrangement between said second end and said vessel,

said non-disconnectable coupling arrangement including a pivoted connection between said first end of said yoke (10, 10') and said body (1) that allows said yoke to rotate about a horizontal axis,

said disconnectable coupling arrangement including a first coupling member (32, 32') at said second end of said yoke which is arranged and designed for mating with a second coupling member (34, 34') carried by said vessel (2),

a tension member (20, 110) arranged and designed to extend through said first and second coupling members and to be coupled between a winch mechanism (18, 18', 106) and a connector (42, 42'), said mechanism and connector being arranged and designed to pull said first coupling mechanism (32, 32') into engagement with said second coupling mechanism (34, 34'),

a selectively operated locking mechanism (80) arranged and designed between said first and second coupling members (32, 34) to lock said yoke (10) to said vessel (2), thereby mooring said vessel (2) to said body (1) or to unlock said yoke (10) from said vessel (2) thereby allowing said tension member (20, 110) to be uncoupled from said connector (42) for disconnecting said yoke (10) from said vessel (1), wherein

said body (1) is an LNG process vessel, and said vessel (2) is an LNG carrier vessel,

said connector is a selectively operated clamping device carried by an extension (8) of said vessel (2),

said tension member has a fitting (19) arranged and designed for being secured by said clamping device, and

 guide wheels (130, 114) are mounted on a support bracket (136) carried by an elastomeric spring (120) at said second end of said yoke (10).

9. (Original) The assembly of claim 8 wherein,

 said tension member is a rope (110).

10. (Currently Amended) An assembly for mooring a vessel (2) at sea to a body (1) comprising

 a yoke (10, 10') selectively disconnectably coupled between said vessel (2) and said body (1) and having first and second ends with a non-disconnectable coupling arrangement between said first end and said body and a disconnectable coupling arrangement between said second end and said vessel,

 said non-disconnectable coupling arrangement including a pivoted connection between said first end of said yoke (10, 10') and said body (1) that allows said yoke to rotate about a horizontal axis,

 said disconnectable coupling arrangement including a first coupling member (32, 32') at said second end of said yoke which is arranged and designed for mating with a second coupling member (34, 34') carried by said vessel (2),

 a tension member (20, 110) arranged and designed to extend through said first and second coupling members and to be coupled between a winch mechanism (18, 18', 106) and a connector (42, 42'), said mechanism and connector being arranged and designed to pull said first coupling mechanism (32, 32') into engagement with said second coupling mechanism (34, 34'),

 a selectively operated locking mechanism (80) arranged and designed between said first and second coupling members (32, 34) to lock said yoke (10) to said vessel (2), thereby

mooring said vessel (2) to said body (1) or to unlock said yoke (10) from said vessel (2) thereby allowing said tension member (20, 110) to be uncoupled from said connector (42) for disconnecting said yoke (10) from said vessel (1), wherein

 said body (1) is an LNG process vessel, and said vessel (2) is an LNG carrier vessel,

 said first coupling member includes a male guide cone (32) mounted on a multiple axis joint (30) which is attached to said second end of said yoke (10),

 said second coupling member includes a female receiver (34) mounted on an extension (8) of said vessel (2) and arranged and designed to receive said guide cone (32)

 said multiple-axis joint (30) is mounted on a pedestal (35) at said second end of said yoke (10), and

 bumpers (36) are mounted on said pedestal (35) at a position below said guide cone (32) and arranged and designed to provide a cushioned stop for said guide cone at extreme deflection angles.

11. (Previously Amended) A method of mooring a vessel (2) to a body (1) in the sea comprising the steps of,

 providing a mooring yoke (10) with a first end pivoted at said body and with a second end having a guide cone (32) and buoyant element (28) provided thereon with said second end of said yoke floating on the sea,

 providing a winching mechanism with a tension member (20) and pull-in rope (40) paid out, with said pull-in rope extending through said guide cone (32),

 mounting a receiver (34) on an extension member (8) of said vessel (2),

 providing a messenger rope (17) wound on a winch (48) on said vessel (2),

 connecting said messenger rope (17) to said pull in rope (40) and pulling said messenger rope (17) and said pull in rope (40) until said tension member (20) is within said receiver (34),

clamping said tension member (20) in said receiver (34),
winding said tension member (20) on said winching mechanism (18), thereby pulling
said second end of said yoke (10) upward from the sea while pulling said guide cone (32) into
said receiver (34), and

selectively locking said receiver (34) and said guide cone, thereby mooring said
vessel (2) to said body via said yoke (10).

12. (Currently amended) The method of claim 11 further comprising the step of
pulling said vessel (2) toward said body (1) with hawsers (12a, 12b) connected to
winches (11a, 11b) on said body (1) while said messenger rope (17) pulls tension member
(20) into said receiver (34) and while said tension member (20) is pulled by said winching
mechanism (18) until said guide cone (32) is pulled in said receiver (34).

13. (Original) The method of claim 11 wherein
said winching mechanism is a windlass (18) mounted on said mooring yoke (10).

14. (Original) The method of claim 11 wherein said
winching mechanism is a rope winch mounted on said body (1).

15. (Currently Amended) An assembly for mooring a first vessel (2) at sea to a second
vessel (1) comprising,

a yoke (10') selectively disconnectably coupled between said first vessel (2) and said
second vessel (1) and having first and second ends with a non-disconnectable coupling
arrangement between said first end and said second vessel (1) and a disconnectable coupling
arrangement between said second end and said first vessel,

said non-disconnectable coupling arrangement including a pivoted connection
between said first end of said yoke and said second vessel that allows said yoke (10') to rotate
about a horizontal axis,

said second end of said yoke having a buoyant element (28) to cause said second end of said yoke (10') not to sink when said second end of said yoke rotates about said horizontal axis into the sea,

 said disconnectable coupling member including a first coupling member (32') at said second end of said yoke which is arranged and designed with a second coupling member (34') carried by said first vessel (2),

 a selectively operated locking mechanism (80) arranged and designed between said first and second coupling members (32, 34) to lock said yoke (10) to said vessel (2), thereby mooring said vessel (2) to said body (1) or to unlock said yoke (10) from said vessel (2) thereby allowing said tension member (20, 110) to be uncoupled from said connector (42) for disconnecting said yoke (10) from said vessel (1),

 a tension member (20, 110) arranged and designed to extend through said first and second coupling members and to be coupled between a winch mechanism (18, 18', 106) and a connector (42, 42'), said winch mechanism and connector being arranged and designed to pull said first coupling mechanism (32, 32') into engagement with said second coupling mechanism (34, 34'), wherein

 said winch mechanism (18) is mounted on said yoke (10).

16. (Cancelled)
17. (Cancelled)
18. (Cancelled)
19. (Cancelled)
20. (Currently Amended) An assembly for mooring a first vessel (2) at sea to a second vessel (1) comprising,

 a yoke (10') selectively disconnectably coupled between said first vessel (2) and said second vessel (1) and having first and second ends with a non-disconnectable coupling

arrangement between said first end and said second vessel (1) and a disconnectable coupling arrangement between said second end and said first vessel,

 said non-disconnectable coupling arrangement including a pivoted connection between said first end of said yoke and said second vessel that allows said yoke (10') to rotate about a horizontal axis,

 said second end of said yoke having a buoyant element (28) to cause said second end of said yoke (10') not to sink when said second end of said yoke rotates about said horizontal axis into the sea,

 said disconnectable coupling member including a first coupling member (32') at said second end of said yoke which is arranged and designed with a second coupling member (34') carried by said first vessel (2),

 a selectively operated locking mechanism (80) arranged and designed between said first and second coupling members (32, 34) to lock said yoke (10) to said vessel (2), thereby mooring said vessel (2) to said body (1) or to unlock said yoke (10) from said vessel (2) thereby allowing said tension member (20, 110) to be uncoupled from said connector (42) for disconnecting said yoke (10) from said vessel (1),

 a tension member (20, 110) arranged and designed to extend through said first and second coupling members and to be coupled between a winch mechanism (18, 18', 106) and a connector (42, 42'), said winch mechanism and connector being arranged and designed to pull said first coupling mechanism (32, 32') into engagement with said second coupling mechanism (34, 34'), wherein

 said first coupling member includes a male guide cone (32') mounted on a multiple axis joint (90) which is attached to said second end of said yoke (10'), and

said second coupling member includes a female receiver (34') mounted on an extension (8) of said first vessel (2) and arranged and designed to receive said guide cone (32'), and

 said multiple axis joint (90) is an elastomeric flex joint in combination with an internal vertical axis yaw bearing.

21. (Currently Amended) An assembly for mooring a first vessel (2) at sea to a second vessel (1) comprising,

 a yoke (10') selectively disconnectably coupled between said first vessel (2) and said second vessel (1) and having first and second ends with a non-disconnectable coupling arrangement between said first end and said second vessel (1) and a disconnectable coupling arrangement between said second end and said first vessel,

 said non-disconnectable coupling arrangement including a pivoted connection between said first end of said yoke and said second vessel that allows said yoke (10') to rotate about a horizontal axis,

 said second end of said yoke having a buoyant element (28) to cause said second end of said yoke (10') not to sink when said second end of said yoke rotates about said horizontal axis into the sea,

 said disconnectable coupling member including a first coupling member (32') at said second end of said yoke which is arranged and designed with a second coupling member (34') carried by said first vessel (2),

 a selectively operated locking mechanism (80) arranged and designed between said first and second coupling members (32, 34) to lock said yoke (10) to said vessel (2), thereby mooring said vessel (2) to said body (1) or to unlock said yoke (10) from said vessel (2) thereby allowing said tension member (20, 110) to be uncoupled from said connector (42) for disconnecting said yoke (10) from said vessel (1),

a tension member (20, 110) arranged and designed to extend through said first and second coupling members and to be coupled between a winch mechanism (18, 18', 106) and a connector (42, 42'), said winch mechanism and connector being arranged and designed to pull said first coupling mechanism (32, 32') into engagement with said second coupling mechanism (34, 34'), wherein

 said first coupling member includes a male guide cone (32') mounted on a multiple axis joint (90) which is attached to said second end of said yoke (10'), and

 said second coupling member includes a female receiver (34') mounted on an extension (8) of said first vessel (2) and arranged and designed to receive said guide cone (32'), and

 said multiple axis joint (90) is a two-axis gimbaled joint in combination with an internal vertical axis yaw bearing (91).